

# October 1917: Coup d'état or social revolution?

*The legitimacy of the Russian  
Revolution*

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## October 1917: Coup d'Etat or social revolution

*The legitimacy of the Russian Revolution*

*Ernest Mandel*

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Although it is no longer "fashionable" to refer to it, the Russian Revolution remains a major experience of this century. Knowledge of it is indispensable to those who wish to understand the contemporary world, or to see clearly how to proceed in the fight for socialism. Ernest Mandel here sets out to analyse it in a polemical and critical essay. Polemical because today this revolution is the target of such a strong campaign of ideological denigration that one of the formative experiences of this century has become incomprehensible. The author, acting as both historian and political activist, comes back to the most essential question: was October 1917 a totalitarian coup d'état or a socially liberating uprising? Critical, because there is nothing less useful than an apologetic reading of history. While vigorously reasserting the deep legitimacy of the Russian Revolution, Ernest Mandel also sets out to situate the mistakes which the Bolshevik leadership made in the period 1917-21. This is a valuable contribution to the discussion on the lessons to be learnt from the history of Bolshevism.

**Ernest Mandel:** Involved in the revolutionary socialist movement from the end of the 1930s, he participated in the struggle against Nazi occupation of Belgium. Leader of the Socialist Workers' Party (Belgium) and of the Fourth International, he is the author of many works including *Marxist Economic Theory*, *Late Capitalism* and *Long Waves of Capitalist Development*. He has already published a first Notebook: *The Place of Marxism in History*.

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